

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

"TONGUES" ARE "LANGUAGES"

I was seven years of age at the time; and my brother, who was nine, was ahead of me in school. One day he brought home his first language book. With pardonable pride he deposited it prominently on our living room table. Its title was *The Mother Tongue*. With a touch of sibling jealousy, I picked it up and ridiculed anyone who would write such a book on such a subject along with all who would read or study it. However, my mother deflated my ego somewhat when she explained that a "tongue" is a "language" and your "mother tongue" is the language you learn from your parents.

I have never forgotten this in all the years that have passed since then. It was a step forward in the knowledge of truth; and in all I have learned since that day, I have never found anything that indicated my mother was not right. A "tongue" is a "language." This fact was of real value when I first studied the Book of Acts, fifty-five years ago. Apart from all other considerations, anyone who reads the second chapter of Acts and says that the gift described there was not the knowledge of languages that were common to the men out of the seventeen nationalities listed simply stamps himself as an unworthy expositor of the Word of God. **"We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God"** (Acts 2:8,11) was the testimony of the devout men who were there that day.

If one considers the dictionary definition of a *tongue*, he will find many shades of meaning. A dictionary defines words according to the use made of them by men. However, of the many definitions given, there are three that stand out. The first is the muscle in the mouth of most vertebrates, used by man primarily as the organ of articulate speech, and by animals for the purpose of taking and swallowing food. The second definition is "a spoken

language," and the third is "unintelligible sounds made in moments of religious excitement and emotional fervor."

If the reader will consider every occurrence of *tongue* (Heb., *lashon*) in the old Testament and every occurrence (Gk., *glossa*) in the New Testament, which I have carefully done, he will find that the first definition is correct and clearly established by Biblical usage. (See Judges 7:5 and Mark 7:33.) He will also find that the second definition is established firmly by the Scriptural occurrences. In fact, the word *tongue* means a *language* in the majority of Biblical passages. However, there is no passage in the Bible that lends any support to the third definition. The word *tongue* in the Bible never means "unintelligible sounds made in moments of religious excitement." If anyone thinks otherwise, then let him point to at least one of the 164 passages where the Hebrew word *lashon* or the Greek word *glossa* appears.

Of course, some will point to the 21 occurrences of the word *tongue* in 1 Cor. 10, 13, and 14, especially those in chapter fourteen where the unwarranted and arbitrary translator's insertion of the word *unknown* before six occurrences has generated much confusion and provided a modicum of support for those who would pass off strange sounds produced by their vocal chords as being the Biblical gift of tongues. This confusion would never have been if church theologians had accepted the simple Biblical facts as to the background of the people to whom the Corinthian epistle was written.

The Corinthians, to whom this letter was addressed, were a great company of Jews who had become believers in the man Jesus as being the promised Messiah to Israel, even their Lord and Savior. That they were Israelites is demonstrated in 1 Cor. 5: 1 where Paul states that there was fornication among them, "**and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles.**" This statement will defy all attempts of honest explanation if those addressed in this epistle are Gentiles.

Paul's language in 1 Cor. 9: 13 shows that he is speaking to those who were entirely familiar with the things practiced in the temple in Jerusalem.

In 1 Cor. 10: 1-4 Paul addresses those to whom he writes as brethren, and reminds them "**how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink.**" Words such as these become sheer nonsense if those to whom he was speaking were Gentiles. These words should settle it for all

who settle things by the Word of God. The Corinthian believers were Israelites. If there were Gentiles among them, they are ignored in this epistle.

Strong objections are anticipated in regard to this. Many will say at once: "But what about 1 Cor. 12:2? Does it not state that these were Gentiles?"

My answer to this is, "No it does not." I do not hesitate to say that the phrase, "Ye were Gentiles," is an anti-Semitic translation; and the interpretations based upon it are one more facet of that conspiracy which is determined to get the Jew out and get the Gentile in. The Greek phrase here is *hote ethne ete pros*, and it means literally "**when nations you were toward.**" These words could only be applied to Israelites who, due to the dispersion and loss of citizenship toward the nation of Israel, found themselves "toward, " that is in relationship to, the nations. In this position they were almost irresistibly led toward involvement in idolatry. It was hard indeed to escape the taint when they were practically submerged in it.

It must always be remembered that the believers to whom this epistle was addressed were Jews in exile, part of the Diaspora that was scattered throughout the Roman empire. In all the colonies of the exiles, it is remarkable how tenaciously the Jews held to their Hebrew language and script. The need for maintaining their original tongue was of the utmost importance; but after seventeen generations in exile, they had to surrender on many points and allow for the translation of the Scriptures into other languages. The best known of these is the Septuagint.

The facts of history, taken from the Talmudic era (the period in which the Talmud was compiled), reveal that the controversy over languages raged constantly in every synagogue and every colony. For example, in Tiberias there was a synagogue that boldly proclaimed its position by taking the name of *Synagogue of Greek-speaking Jews*. However, the use of Hebrew in most areas was constantly reinforced by new arrivals from Palestine; and these newcomers provided fresh fuel for the ancient controversy.

In the end, there being no central authority, each synagogue had to settle for itself what language or languages men could use to pray, speak, or translate the Hebrew Scriptures. As a rule, most prayers were in Hebrew; Scripture readings were in both Hebrew and Greek; and discussions were allowed in any language, as long as it was one understood by some of the participants. A Megillah Mishna, referring to the book of Esther, says that the public reading is not properly done if the language used is one the reader

does not understand. It further declares: "It is lawful, however, to read to those who know no Hebrew in a foreign language which they understand." Not all synagogue rulers or rabbis would have been as liberal as this.

The few facts set forth above will give the reader some idea of the controversy concerning languages that raged continually among the dispersed people of Israel, from the dispersion of Israel in 600 B.C. right down to A.D. 54 when Paul first preached in the synagogue of Corinth. This was a seaport and the mixed flow of races that constantly passed through it would keep the controversy alive. A Jew from some distant place might stop in Corinth for weeks or months, and his first inclination would be to seek out his fellow Israelites in their synagogue. But he created a problem if he spoke a language that none of them understood, especially if he insisted on doing so. This was the problem with which Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 14. His authoritative conclusions are summed up in these words:

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known that is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. (1 Cor. 14:8-11.)

He concludes the whole matter by saying: **I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet among the outcalled I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue. (1 Cor. 14: 18, 19.)**

And with these inspired words of Paul, I most heartily agree. The failure to relate 1 Cor. 14 to the ancient controversy concerning languages in Israel, especially among the exiles, and the anti-Semitic error of applying this epistle exclusively to Gentiles has caused much confusion.

As to the present movement in which thousands in all denominations are uttering unintelligible sounds, then insisting that this is the Biblical gift of tongues, the present day believer in Jesus Christ has explicit and complete guidance.

In 1 Timothy 6:20 the Apostle tells Timothy to "**avoid profane and vain babblings.**" The words "vain babblings" are one word in the Greek,

kenophonia, which is made by combining two words *kenos*, (*empty*) and *phonia* (sound). The word in its context here can mean nothing else but meaningless sounds. These, we are told to avoid, or turn away from (*ektrempomenos*). The same truth is repeated in 2 Tim. 2: 16 where we are told to shun or stand aloof from meaningless sounds.

In view of this, I have my instructions from the Word of God in regard to meaningless sounds. I am to turn away from all such. I am to stand aloof from them. This I have done, and this I will continue to do in the confidence that I will hear His "well done" for having taken Him at His Word and responded accordingly. I refuse to have anything to do with meaningless sounds that are gibberish and with their so-called translations which are pure imagination. These are simply works of the flesh. When this foolishness is attributed to the Holy Spirit, it is a satanic delusion.

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